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30 July 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : Overhead Photographic Reconnaissance
of Cuba

1. Following your instructions from the 27 June USIB meeting, COMIREX coordinated the further review of the use of SR-71 versus U-2R aircraft for reconnaissance of Cuba. The review resolved all issues except political.

a. Political Factors: You asked the State Department to reevaluate its position on the political acceptability of switching from U-2 to SR-71 aircraft. On 26 July, Under Secretary of State Sisco reaffirmed the position of the Department that on political grounds the U-2R is preferable to the SR-71 because it maintains continuity with past practices. He is concerned that a change could be interpreted as a political signal and believes it is preferable not to present new factors to the Cubans at this time. He is said to be aware of the cost and operational factors involved in the choice of aircraft.

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WARNING NOTICE
SENSITIVE INTELLIGENCE SOURCES
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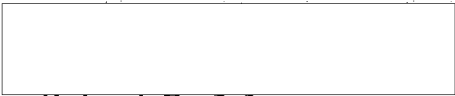
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c. Other Considerations: Individual SR-71 flights are more costly than U-2R flights, but this is offset because minimum SR-71 flight activity and tanker support must be maintained for training even in the absence of operational missions. The USAF and JRC also report that the sonic boom of SR-71 missions probably would not be a problem. Although the noise would be evident in relatively quiet rural areas, the Cubans regularly operate supersonic aircraft and the SR-71 sonic boom probably would not be noted as unusual or identified as foreign by the local populace.

d. Standby Alert: There is agreement that a 96-hour alert status for aircraft missions is adequate for response to special situations of the types occurring over the past several years.

2. To resolve the political question, the State Department has recommended that the option of using the SR-71 be reviewed by Dr. Kissinger in his capacity as Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. Attached is a proposed memorandum for your signature advising Dr. Kissinger of the USIB review of the Cuba requirements and asking for his decision concerning the use of the SR-71.

3. Revisions to the USIB Memorandum detailing the Cuba requirements will be made after a decision has been reached on the choice of aircraft.


Roland S. Inlow
Chairman, COMIREX


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Concurrence page for "Overhead Photographic Reconnaissance of Cuba,"
dated 30 July 1974, SECRET/SENSITIVE

Concur


Deputy Director for Intelligence

30 July 74
Date

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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

Executive Registry
74-2369

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31 JUL 1974

MEMORANDUM FOR: Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

SUBJECT : Overhead Photographic Reconnaissance of Cuba

1. A decision is required on whether SR-71 aircraft may be used in place of U-2's for airborne photographic reconnaissance of Cuba. Background on this question is outlined below including the differences of view among organizations. The decision options are presented for consideration in paragraph 3.

Background

2. The USIB has recently completed an extensive review and approved some major changes to the standing national requirements for overhead photographic reconnaissance of Cuba. These changes, as noted below, affect previous arrangements of relatively long standing.

a. In the future it is planned to utilize photographic satellite systems rather than manned aircraft as the primary source of reconnaissance photography of the island. This change was implemented [redacted]

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b. The requirement for complete coverage of Cuba has been reduced to a frequency of once every four months.

c. A manned aircraft reconnaissance presence over Cuba will be maintained, but at a sharply reduced level--one mission each three to four months to assure, for political purposes, a continuing U.S. overflight presence.

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d. The capability for manned aircraft flights over the island to meet unpredictable time-sensitive intelligence needs will be maintained, but on a 96-hour alert status rather than the costly 24-hour alert status maintained in the past. This change will reduce overall costs and the immediate alert status will be modified whenever a special situation develops.

Decision Options

3. The major question for your consideration and decision involves the aircraft system to be used for c. and d. above--that is, whether to continue with the U-2R which has been employed since 1962, or to replace it with the SR-71. As you know, both aircraft provide comparable photography.

a. Under Secretary of State Sisco has reaffirmed the position of the Department that on political grounds the U-2R is preferable to the SR-71 because it maintains continuity with past practices. He is concerned that a change could be interpreted as a political signal and believes it is preferable not to present new factors to the Cubans at this time.

b. The argument for switching to the SR-71 is both economic and operational.

The SR-71 is relatively invulnerable to Cuban air defenses, it can be occasionally tasked for these missions rather than being dedicated to them, and therefore is preferred for the new requirement of flying only three to four missions a year.

/s/ Bill

W. E. Colby

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